

Trial Court Programs Division

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The Trial Court Programs Division provides support services to the trial courts in a variety of program areas. The division is divided into two primary service units: Court Programs and Trial Court Funding. Each unit provides and administers myriad programs and services for the trial courts, playing a critical role in the development and implementation of policy related to trial courts as promulgated by the Judicial Council and influenced by the Legislature.

Court Programs Unit

The Court Programs Unit, which is responsible for developing policy and proposing legislative changes, attempts to focus on the “big-picture” in administering programs. Current program emphases include drug courts, traffic, implementation of the California Standards of Judicial Administration, management of the statewide Court Interpreters Program, and statewide jury reform.

Additionally, the unit provides a variety of direct operational services to the trial courts. Programs coordinated by this unit include the Assigned Judges Program, case coordination, the Ralph N. Kleps Awards, and the Small Court Assistance Program. The staff of the Court Programs unit is responsible for staffing the Judicial Council’s Trial Court Presiding Judges Advisory Committee and Court Executives Advisory committee.

Court Interpreters Program

From 1973 through 1990, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) acted as a statewide clearinghouse for information about court interpreters, thereby assisting the courts, interpreter organizations, and individual interpreters as well as numerous government agencies and others who had questions and problems. With the enactment of Senate Bill 1304, effective January 1, 1993, the Judicial Council of California became directly responsible for the California Court Interpreters Program, which had been created to improve court interpreter services and administration. The council formed the Court Interpreters Advisory Panel to assist it in implementing this comprehensive program. The guiding principle for the advisory panel has been to improve access to the courts for non-English-speaking people by improving the quality of interpreting and increasing the number of qualified interpreters in the trial courts.

Statewide Jury Reform

Reform of California’s jury system is one of the Judicial Council’s top priorities. Chief Justice Ronald M. George is dedicated to improving conditions for jurors and increasing citizen participation in the jury system. The Blue Ribbon Commission on Jury System Improvement, appointed in 1995, represented the Judicial Council’s first major effort in recent history to undertake a comprehensive review of the jury system. On the recommendation of the Blue Ribbon Commission, Chief Justice George

appointed two task forces to oversee jury reform efforts in California: the Task Force on Jury System Improvements and the Task Force on Jury Instructions. The Jury System Improvement Project will work to improve many facets of the jury system, including juror education and outreach, juror facilities and security, education of judges and court staff, juror summonses, length of juror service, juror per diem fees, and juror source lists.

Drug Court Program

In the early 1990s some jurisdictions developed drug treatment courts as an alternative to traditional criminal justice prosecution for drug-related offenses. Drug treatment courts combine the close supervision of the judicial process with the resources available through various community drug treatment services. The two primary goals of these courts are to reduce recidivism in offenders with drug problems and to create options within the criminal justice system to tailor effective and appropriate responses to those offenders.

The California Drug Court Project was first funded in 1996 with \$500,000 from the Edward Byrne Memorial State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance Program administered by the U.S. Department of Justice. The project is in the process of structuring an evaluation program for all drug courts in the state. The Oversight Committee for the California Drug Court Project continues to develop protocols for the implementation, expansion, and evaluation of drug courts, which will be submitted to the Judicial Council for adoption statewide. The primary goal of the California Drug Court Project is to encourage the development of drug courts in California by providing funding and professional support. The project will work to develop and

promote consistent and professional standards for drug courts and will monitor and evaluate the progress of the drug courts that have received mini-grants, to determine effective strategies.

Traffic Program

In the 1960s a staff attorney at the AOC prepared the bail schedules. As the schedules grew and traffic law became more complex, the AOC added staff to handle the increased workload. The Traffic Program was created with the goals of (1) simplifying, standardizing, and automating traffic-related forms and procedures by working with courts, the law enforcement community, state agencies, and special interest groups and (2) providing traffic adjudication workshops to judicial officers and court personnel to promote consistent application of traffic laws. The adjudication workshop provides the only statewide forum for members of the judiciary to discuss common problems and exchange ideas on traffic matters.

Assigned Judges

Article VI, section 6 of the California Constitution provides that the Chief Justice shall seek to expedite judicial business and to equalize the work of the judges. The Judicial Assignments Unit assists the Chief Justice in executing his or her plenary power to assign active and retired judges to the statewide courts. The need for judicial assistance results primarily from vacancies, illnesses, disqualifications, and the need to replace new judges while they attend orientation classes.

Small Court Assistance Program

The regional Small Court Assistance Program, initiated in October 1995, is a service-oriented model borrowed from the private sector. The

program focuses on (1) modernizing judicial administration practices in the areas of court and case management and (2) improving access, fairness, and diversity in the judicial branch by addressing the effects of criminal caseloads on the trial courts. It also addresses the trial courts' heightened demand for technical and procedural assistance and policy development.

Trial Court Presiding Judges and Court Executives Advisory Committees

The Trial Court Presiding Judges Advisory Committee and the Court Executives Advisory Committee, formed in 1992 at the request of the Judicial Council 36 Executive and Planning Committee, play a crucial role in improving judges' and court executives' access to and participation in the Judicial Council's decision-making process. The committees' activities include reviewing rules, forms, and standards; identifying issues of concern to the courts, such as legislative issues that might be considered by the council; and increasing communication between the council and the trial courts.

Ralph N. Kleps Award

The award created in honor of Ralph N. Kleps, the first administrative director of the California courts, is presented annually in recognition of the contributions made by individual courts to the administration of justice. Innovation and transferability are among the criteria for the award.

Coordination of Multi-Court Civil Actions

Coordination is a procedural device in which complex civil actions that are pending in more than one court with similar law and facts are combined for all purposes. As required by rule, all administrative functions in coordination

proceedings are performed at the direction of the Chief Justice.

Trial Court Funding Unit

The funding of California's trial courts has been a primary focus of the AOC for the past 11 years. Commencing with the Brown-Presley Trial Court Funding Act of 1985, the Trial Court Funding Program has moved into the forefront of policy creation and implementation. The Trial Court Budget Commission (TCBC) is the primary body charged with the development of the annual statewide budget request for the trial courts for each fiscal year, subject to approval by the Judicial Council. The TCBC also develops recommended allocation policies and schedules for the trial courts upon the determination of the state funding appropriation for the trial courts. The unit provides assistance to the trial courts on issues of budgeting, allocation, and the application of Judicial Council rules and policies in those areas. It was created in 1997 to facilitate the implementation of the new statewide financing system by the judicial branch of the government.

The 27-member Judicial Council is the policymaking body of the California courts, the largest and busiest court system in the nation. Under the leadership of the Chief Justice and in accordance with the California Constitution, the council is responsible for ensuring the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice. The Administrative Office of the Courts serves as the staff agency to the council.